THE APSE MURALS IN SAN AGUSTÍN DE ACOLMAN: AUGUSTINIAN FRIARS AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE ROMAN CHURCH IN NEW SPAIN

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the apse murals in the sixteenth-century Augustinian mission church of San Agustín de Acolman. These murals feature three horizontal rows of enthroned popes, bishops, cardinals, and friars. I connect these murals to contemporary conflicts between the regular and secular clergy in the New Spanish church, arguing that the Augustinians at Acolman used their apse to hierarchically position themselves within the New Spanish church.

The figures in these murals will be identified as an allegory of the Roman Church. Comparisons will be drawn between the murals and the Sistine Chapel, suggesting that Acolman's allegorical image of the Church connoted papal power. I also highlight the position of the friars in the lowest level of the murals. Through a comparison with retablos, I demonstrate that these friars are the foundation of the Church. Finally, I reflect upon the implications of allegorizing the Church as a collection of Augustinians.

INTRODUCTION

In 1929, art historian José Montes de Oca wrote a brief description of the apse murals in the sixteenth-century Augustinian mission church of San Agustín de Acolman.[1] He concludes his description with these words: "With admirable precision...[the figures] are formed. The faces are marvelous; the clothing, terrific. Who could describe these paintings...in written form, to those who cannot go to Acolman! We declare ourselves incompetent."[2] As indicated by this quote, Montes de Oca is concerned primarily with describing and praising the murals. What his discussion lacks is an evaluation of how these murals would have functioned within a sixteenth-century Augustinian church. This thesis picks up where Montes de Oca and all subsequent scholars have left off, by examining Acolman's apse murals within their original context.

Located in the State of Mexico, Acolman was one of nearly 300 missionary complexes, or *conventos*, established by the New Spanish mendicants. These missionary complexes typically consisted of a monastery attached to a large single-nave church.[3]

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[1] For the best images of Acolman, including of the apse murals, see Jaime Ortiz Lajous. San Agustín de Acolman. México: Teléfonos de México, 1990.

[2] *"Con precisión admirable fueron hechas. Los rostros son maravillosos; los ropajes, estupendos. ¡Quién pudiera describir esas pinturas, con sus caracteres genuinos, para darlas, en forma literaria, a los que no pueden ir a Acolman! Nosotros nos declaramos incompetentes."* José G. Montes de Oca. *San Agustín Acolman, Estado de México*. ed. Mario Colín. México: Biblioteca Enciclopédica del Estado de México, 1975, 25.

[3] For more on sixteenth-century architecture, see George Kubler. *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*. New Haven: Yale, 1948. Kubler remains the most comprehensive source on sixteenth-century mendicant architecture. For a more updated source, see Jaime Lara. *City, Temple, Stage: Eschatological Architecture and Liturgical Theatrics in New Spain*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004. For a brief introduction to sixteenth-century New Spanish art, see Jorge Alberto Manrique. "El arte novohispano en los siglos XVI y XVII." in *Una visión del arte y de la historia* vol. III. ed. Martha Fernández and Margarito Sandoval. México: UNAM, 2001: 41-60.

Acolman was founded in 1539, and the church itself was completed in 1560.[4] Its single-nave church faces east to west, with a polygonal apse in the east and a choir balcony in the west. The nave, *sotocoro*, and choir balcony are covered by a groin vault, and over the apse, there is elaborate ribbed vaulting. The roof is supported by compound doric pilasters on the interior and heavy buttressing on the exterior.[5]

The apse murals (which I will date 1591-1620) feature three horizontal rows of evenly-spaced popes, bishops, cardinals, and friars seated on massive thrones and holding books and staffs.[6] They are arranged in a hierarchical fashion with the friars at the bottom, cardinals and bishops in the middle, and popes at the top level. Above the popes, there is a series of eight figures identified by inscriptions as saints, prophets, and sibyls. Because of their prominent location around the high altar in an Augustinian church, and because they are surrounded by inscriptions directed to Augustinians, these figures are likely Augustinians as well.[7] The apse murals, as a material object, are the center of this study. Their hierarchical arrangement and location within the *convento* will be

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[4] Montes de Oca, 21.

[5] We cannot safely date both of the apse windows to the sixteenth century. Since the window on the south wall is nearly twice the size of the other, and it partially obscures two of the *ignudi* and two inscriptions, it appears to have been added after the apse murals were painted. For general information about windows in sixteenth-century churches, see Kubler, 276-79.

[6] According to Montes de Oca, 25, the thrones are 3 x 2.5 meters each.

[7] These figures are identified as Augustinians by most scholars. See for example: Montes de Oca, 25.

highlighted and connected with contemporary categories of mendicant art. What the visual evidence presents will be corroborated with the historical record.[8]

As an examination of sixteenth-century murals within their contemporary context, this paper builds off the scholarship of Elena Estrada de Gerlero, Donna Pierce, Jeannette Favrot Peterson, and Susan Verdi Webster. Considering the nave murals (1569-1572) in the Augustinian *convento* of Ixmiquilpan, Estrada de Gerlero has argued that, while ostensibly they are metaphorical battles between good and evil, in the context of local conversion they are battles inspired by the Chichimec War. Pierce has identified the warriors as the Otomí and Chichimecs. Peterson's work on the 1571-1585 garden murals in the cloister of the Augustinian *convento* at Malinalco indicates that these garden scenes were syncretic visions of a millennial paradise. Webster has examined the 1582-1640 nave murals in the Franciscan *convento* of Huejotzingo, arguing that they represent specific ritual activities of the local confraternity of Vera Cruz.[9] The scholarship of Estrada de Gerlero, Pierce, Peterson, and Webster demonstrate that sixteenth-century murals were part of carefully-planned artistic programs. Furthermore, these murals often alluded directly to contemporary local issues and would have resonated with a contemporary audience. Like these three scholars, I will also interpret Acolman's apse

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[8] Tom Cummins would define this methodology as materialist art history. See Tom Cummins. "A Sculpture, a Column, and a Painting: The Tension between Art and History." *Art Bulletin* 77 (September 1995): 371-374.

[9] Elena Estrada de Gerlero. "El friso monumental de Itzmiquilpan." *Actes du XLII Congres International des Americanistes* X (1976): 9-19; Jeanette Favrot Peterson. *The Paradise Garden Murals of Malinalco: Utopia and Empire in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993; Donna L. Pierce. "Identification of the Warriors in the Frescos of Ixmiquilpan." *Research Center for the Arts* 4 (Oct. 1981): 1-8; Susan Verdi Webster. "Art, Ritual, and Confraternities in Sixteenth-Century New Spain." *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 70 (1997): 5-39.

murals within the context of a local issue. This issue is the conflict between the two branches of the New Spanish church.

In the sixteenth-century New Spanish church, there were two branches of the clergy. The regular clergy, also known as the mendicants, were members of several male monastic orders, primarily the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians. Members of the regular clergy renounced their traditionally reclusive lifestyles to directly engage with the public through evangelizing, teaching, and preaching. They tended to settle in rural areas and ministered primarily to the indigenous population. The other branch of the New Spanish church was known as the secular clergy. The secular clergy was the broad designation applying to all levels of the church which did not include the monastic orders. The secular clergy included for example, the pope, as well as bishops, cardinals, and parish priests. They tended to settle in urban areas and ministered primarily to the Spanish population.[10]

Scholars have typically organized the sixteenth-century church into three distinct phases. According to historian John Frederick Schwaller, the first phase, which he refers to as the "noninstitutional church," lasted from 1521 to approximately 1540. During this period, the mendicants, not the secular clergy, were the primary arm of the New Spanish church. They had the full support of both the monarch and pope, both of whom indulged the regulars a wide latitude to perform functions normally reserved for parish priests and bishops. The second phase of the early church occurred between 1540 and the 1570s.

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[10] For more on these two branches, see for example, John Frederick Schwaller. *The Church and Clergy in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987.

During this period, the secular clergy expanded rapidly, facilitated by the creation of dioceses and the founding of the University of Mexico (in 1553) as a seminary. In Schwaller's third phase, between 1570 and the mid eighteenth century, the church was dominated by the Jesuits and their creole allies.[11]

Phases such as those established by Schwaller have also shaped how scholars organize colonial religious art. During the first phase of the church, scholars see art as primarily didactic because of the need to convert the indigenous population.[12] Beginning in 1555, however, art production shifted to accommodate the needs of the secular clergy, a shift that reflected the growing influence of that group during the second phase of the church.[13] After 1570, during the third phase of the church, art production was controlled by the Jesuits, the secular clergy, and their creole allies.[14]

The three phases of the church provide a convenient way to organize colonial art into intelligible categories. However, the codification of New Spanish art cannot account for all colonial artistic output. For instance, how would we classify Acolman's apse murals? Thematically, they represent the Augustinians as the dominant arm of the church, but they date from the late sixteenth century. Their subject-matter places them in the early phase of colonial art when the mendicants were the primary branch of the

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[11] Schwaller, 47, 67-68.

[12] For example, there is a mural cycle narrating the life of the Virgin in the lower level of the small cloister at Acolman. The friars would have used these images to teach doctrine to the indigenous population.

[13] For example, construction of the Cathedral of Mexico began in 1573.

[14] For example, in his 1771 painting *Ministry of San José*, José de Alcíbar portrays the story of San José bestowing favors on various figures, a story with parallels to rulership in the Colony and the recent expulsion of the Jesuits.

church. However, their probable date, 1591-1620, occurs during the last phase of art, the phase of Jesuit, secular, and creole art. How do we account, therefore, for murals which endow the Augustinians with a marked status in the church at a time when the mendicant church was supposedly in decline?

In fact, the late sixteenth-century mendicant church was not in decline, although it was altering under pressure from the secular clergy. The seculars attempted to suppress the mendicants' rights to perform sacraments, own land, and make decisions independently of the bishops. Over a long period, approximately 1555 to the mid eighteenth century, the seculars succeeded in taking away these privileges, but it was an arduous trial on both sides.[15] In fact, members of the regular clergy were active throughout the colonial period, particularly in areas such as New Mexico, Arizona, Chiapas, and Northern Mexico.[16]

In central Mexico, the late sixteenth-century Augustinians continued to flourish. For instance, they established a major province in Michoacán in 1596.[17] Acolman also prospered. In 1595, the friars owned extensive property in both Acolman and Texcoco.[18]

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[15] D.A. Brading. "Tridentine Catholicism and Enlightened Despotism in Bourbon Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 15 (May 1983): 1-22, esp. 6-11. 1555 marks the date of the First Provincial Synod. This council mandated that the friars stop building monasteries and could no longer perform marriages. However, the fact that these decrees were not immediately effective is indicated by Acolman's construction between 1558-1560.

[16] See for example, A. C. van Oss. *Catholic Colonialism: A Parish History of Guatemala, 1524-1821*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. See also, Samuel Y. Edgerton. *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001, 248-297.

[17] Antonio Rubial García. *El convento agustino y la sociedad novohispana: 1533-1630*. México: UNAM, 1989, 14.

[18] Rubial García, 198.

This paper will rethink the categories of sixteenth-century New Spanish art by exploring Acolman's apse murals as thematically relevant, not to the Augustinians of the early century, but to the Augustinians of the late century.

During these later years, the mendicants united against the seculars to defend their independent position in the church. In order to garner support, the mendicants produced a torrent of literature justifying their status in the church and commemorating their achievements in New Spain. The authors of many of these texts reiterated that they were working under the auspices of the true Church in Rome and with the complete authority of the pope. Therefore, their independence from the secular hierarchy was admissible because it was sanctioned by the pope himself.[19]

This thesis argues that the conflict between the regular and secular clergy is a legitimate framework for interpreting the mural cycle in Acolman's apse. It will argue that the Augustinians at Acolman used the space of their apse to hierarchically situate themselves within the New Spanish church. Following art historian Francisco de la Maza, the collected group of figures in Acolman's murals will first be identified as an allegory of the Church.[20] Comparisons will be drawn between the Sistine Chapel and Acolman's apse murals, and it will be shown that Acolman's allegorical image of the

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[19] Stafford Poole. *Pedro Moya de Contreras: Catholic Reform and Royal Power in New Spain, 1571-1591.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 66-67.

[20] Francisco de la Maza. *La mitología clásica en el arte colonial de México*. México: UNAM, 1968, 43. Maza first noted a correlation between the group of saints in Acolman's apse and representations of the church. However, in his estimation, the church represented at Acolman was the keeper of truth in an eschatological context, rather than a vision of the Roman church as the legitimizer of mendicant activity in New Spain. Maza's interpretation will be discussed in greater detail below.

Church connoted papal power and influence. These references to papal power within the apse imply that the Augustinian establishment of Acolman is authorized by the Pope.

This thesis will also highlight the position of the Augustinian friars in the lowest level of these murals. Through a comparison with contemporary retablos, it will be demonstrated that these friars serve as the foundation of the Church. In its final section, this thesis will reflect upon the implications of allegorizing the Church as a collection of *Augustinians*, guided by Augustine and supported by Augustinian friars.

Audience

It will be useful here to establish the audience for the apse murals. We know that both friars and natives had access to many areas in these mendicant missions, including the nave of the church. Particularly by the end of the sixteenth century, with massive decreases in population, church buildings would have been large enough to hold worshipers for regular services.[21] Also, as Webster has recently demonstrated, confraternities often used areas of the *convento*, including the church, to stage their ritual processions.[22] Considering the wide variety of people who could access the church, it

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[21] Before that time, many church services were held outside in the *atrio*, the large open plaza in front of many mendicant churches. For more on open chapels and *atrios*, see John McAndew. *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-Century Mexico.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.

[22] Webster, 5-39.

would be shortsighted to claim that the audience for the apse murals was only one particular group, such as indigenous laymen, confraternities, or creole mendicants.

For my definition of audience, I will adopt that established by Tom Cummins in a recent article about the Huejotzingo codex. Cummins argues that the same image of the Virgin and Child in panel five of the Huejotzingo codex conveyed radically different meanings to an indigenous and Spanish audience.[23] Like Cummins, I recognize that several different audiences would have confronted Acolman's apse murals on a regular basis, and I do not question that these audiences would have interpreted the murals differently. However, it is the purpose of this thesis to consider the apse murals as a cycle directed toward a mendicant audience.

Like the Huejotzingo codex, there is evidence within Acolman's murals themselves which would have, literally, spoken directly to a mendicant audience. This evidence can be found in the Latin inscriptions located between each of the popes on both the south and north walls. These inscriptions form a clockwise narrative beginning with St. Augustine on the south wall closest to the altar. When strung together, they can be roughly translated as "Augustine, light of the church, doctor emeritus, killer of heretics. You establish the holy rule for your saints. Through you we find and follow the road [of righteousness]. Your rule provides a solid architecture for us."[24] Because they refer

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[23] Tom Cummins. "The Madonna and Horse: Becoming Colonial in New Spain and Peru." in *Native Artists and Patrons in Colonial Latin America*. ed. Emily Good Umberger and Tom Cummins. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 1995, 52-75.

[24] My translation is partially based off that provided by: Margarita Flores Martínez, Maria del Carmen Islas Dominguez, and Lilian Polo Ortiz de Montellano. *Programa iconografico e iconologico de la portada y pintura mural del convento de San Agustín Acolman*. BA thesis, Universidad Iberoamericana, 1980, 148-152.

directly to the monastic life, these inscriptions would have resonated with a mendicant audience.

It should be noted here that, by focusing exclusively on a mendicant audience, I am in no way advocating the so-called "spiritual conquest" school of thought. According to this traditional scholarly perspective, the *conquistadors* and Spanish monarch sent the mendicants off to rebellious areas to pacify the countryside. Scholars who have adopted this perspective generally conclude that the large number of sixteenth-century mendicant churches attest to the almost-miraculous success with which these evangelizers pacified and converted the recalcitrant natives.[25]

However, since Charles Gibson's groundbreaking 1964 book The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule, new research has emphasized the more cooperative nature of these missionary enterprises.[26] We now know that, in many cases, the indigenous people in a particular area worked closely with the mendicants to establish and facilitate the growth of the church. In fact, most if not all artists of *convento* murals were indigenous painters.[27] This cooperation between indigenous groups and mendicants is evident, for example, in the presence of an indigenous place-sign on Acolman's facade. It is likely that an indigenous audience would have read the apse murals differently than a mendicant audience, and the painter himself may have encoded meanings into the murals that only

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[25] See for example, Robert Ricard. *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572.* Lesley Byrd Simpson, trans. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

[26] Charles Gibson. *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule; A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964.

[27] See for example, Constantino Reyes-Valerio. *Arte indocristiano*. México: INAH, 2000.

an indigenous audience would have understood.[28] I recognize that all of these processes frequently occurred in sixteenth-century mendicant art, but it is not the intent of this thesis to examine these issues as they relate to Acolman's apse murals.

[28] For more on how indigenous artists coded meanings into their murals, see, for example, Serge Gruzinski. *El águila y la sibila: frescos indios de México*. Barcelona: M. Moleiro, 1994. Gruzinski does not discuss Acolman's apse murals.

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING THE MENDICANT PROJECT IN LATE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY NEW SPAIN

In the first half of this chapter, I outline the history and major features of the sixteenth-century New Spanish church. Throughout, I focus on its two competing branches: the secular and regular clergy. I look at how the secular clergy tried to curtail the influential position of the regular clergy, and how the regular clergy responded to these attacks. In the second half of this chapter, I provide an overview of the New Spanish Augustinians. From there, I trace the establishment and history of Acolman.

The head of the sixteenth-century New Spanish church was not the pope, but the Spanish monarch. The monarch obtained permission to lead the colonial church through a series of papal bulls between 1493 and 1508. These bulls included three from Alexander VI, the *Inter caetera* (1493), *Eximae devotionis* (1493), and the *Eximae devotionis* (1501), and one from Julius II, the *Universalis ecclesiae* (1508). These bulls gave the monarch jurisdiction over all his colonies with the stipulation that he facilitate the spread of Christianity. The monarch was also allowed to collect a tithe and nominate ecclesiastical officials. The wide-ranging privileges accorded to the monarch by the pope were effective in facilitating a colonial church ruled by both royal law and canon law.[29]

There were three sources of canon law. Christ himself was the highest and most authoritative source. On a practical level, however, the pope, who received his authority

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[29] Schwaller, 2-5.

directly from St. Peter, and church councils, such as the Council of Trent (1545-1563), were the primary sources of canon law. In order to standardize practice and ensure a uniformly organized church under his own jurisdiction, Charles V (1500-1558) created a rigid hierarchy of ecclesiastical officials in New Spain. For this paper, the three most pertinent levels of hierarchy in the New Spanish church were the archbishop, bishop, and parish priest. As dictated by Charles V, the archbishop of Mexico was the local head of the New Spanish church. The bishop was his regional representative, serving as head of an individual diocese. Parish priests served at the discretion of the bishop and typically reported directly to him. This hierarchy of archbishop, bishop, and parish priest is known as the secular clergy.[30]

As Schwaller has demonstrated, however, the strict and universal hierarchy envisioned by Charles V was more ambitious than local conditions would permit. In fact, it was never fully realized during the sixteenth century because there were two competing branches of clergy: the seculars and regulars.[31] As I will argue in my final chapter, Acolman's apse murals also present an image of strict hierarchy, but with Augustine at the head of the Roman Church and Augustinian friars as his New Spanish representatives.

As discussed in the Introduction, the regular clergy consisted of members of several male monastic orders who renounced their reclusive lifestyles to serve as missionaries. The Augustinians, Dominicans, and Franciscans were the primary

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[30] Schwaller, 4-12; 67-109.

[31] Schwaller, 3-4.

members of the regular clergy in sixteenth century New Spain. Since mendicants were commonly believed to be more virtuous and honest than the secular clergy, both Charles V and Cortés preferred that they evangelize the new colony.[32]

The first mendicants to arrive in New Spain were three Flemish Franciscans: Pedro de Gante, Juan de Aora, and Juan de Tecto. They arrived in 1522. They were followed in 1524 by twelve more Franciscans, known as "the Twelve." The Franciscans initially established themselves in Mexico City, Texcoco, Huejotzingo, and Tlaxcala, but soon spread throughout central Mexico. In 1535, the viceroy allowed them to establish their own province, which was essentially a geographical center from which they conducted their own missionary activities. The establishment of this center, combined with a growing number of creole mendicants, ensured rapid expansion and growth. While we are unsure about exact numbers, Franciscan chronicler Jerónimo de Mendieta claims that in 1590 there were 166 Franciscan churches.[33]

Perhaps because they left a more extensive written record, the Franciscans have been associated with the primary missionary work in New Spain. However, the Dominicans and Augustinians were also influential. In 1526, the first twelve Dominicans arrived in New Spain. They were not as successful as the Franciscans in establishing themselves in central Mexico, instead flourishing in Chiapas and Guatemala.[34] The first

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[32] Oss, 1-4.

[33] McAndrew, 28-33; D.A. Brading, *The First America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 298.

[34] For an excellent study of the Dominicans in Chiapas and Guatemala, see Oss.

Augustinians arrived in New Spain in 1533, and established Acolman in 1539. Since they were the last major order to arrive, they frequently came into conflict with the Franciscans who had already established *conventos* in major areas throughout central Mexico. In a separate section below, I will discuss the New Spanish Augustinians in more detail.

The monarchy's preference for mendicants as evangelizers was not unprecedented at a time when evangelization was compatible with the ideals of monastic solitude and retreat. In fact, monks and hermits had actively engaged in missionary work since the early thirteenth century.[35] What distinguished the New Spanish mendicants from their European predecessors was their authorization to perform duties traditionally reserved for bishops and parish priests. The most contentious of these privileges was papal approval to perform the sacraments, particularly their right to perform the Eucharist.

The mendicants were permitted to administer the sacraments in three successive papal rulings. The first of these rulings was released on April 25, 1521 by Pope Leo X.[36] Leo's Brief essentially empowered the mendicants to work without the express permission of the bishops, giving them the right to administer the Eucharist, conduct confirmations, bless chapels and altars, and grant indulgences. This ruling reflected a New Spanish reality whereby there were far more mendicants than bishops. Therefore, it

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[35] Oss, 1-4.

[36] Leo's Brief applied to mendicant activity in all of the Spanish colonies. This accounts for its early date.

was impractical for the mendicants to effectively evangelize if they had to rely on bishops or parish priests to administer the sacraments.

Leo's Brief was confirmed and expanded with the *Exponi Nobis*, a papal bull released by Adrian VI on May 10, 1522. The *Exponi Nobis*, also known as the *Omnímoda*, was the papal bull most frequently cited by the mendicants as justification for their own work. This bull was of such paramount significance, that Augustinian chronicler Juan de Grijalva referred to it as "the widest bull ever dispatched in the Roman Curia."[37] These privileges were later renewed in the *Etsi mendicantium ordines* by Pope Pius V in 1567.[38]

The regular clergy needed to frequently cite papal bulls as justification for their position in the church because the secular clergy often remonstrated against the regulars, accusing them of disregard for the established hierarchy of the church.[39] According to this hierarchy, the friars, like secular parish priests, were supposed to report directly to the bishop. Instead, the regulars bypassed the bishop altogether because it would have limited their sovereignty.[40] A full discussion of the various actions taken by the seculars against the regulars is impossible in this paper. Here I will briefly outline one of the most contentious issues, which was the right to perform the Eucharist.

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[37] As quoted in Poole (1987), 67.

[38] For more on these papal bulls, see Poole (1987), 66-67; Robert Padden. "The *Ordenanza del Patronazgo*: An Interpretive Essay." *The Americas* 12 (April 1956): 333-54.

[39] Padden, "The *Ordenanza del Patronazgo*: An Interpretive Essay."

[40] I am grateful to Kevin Gosner for explaining this to me.

In Europe, only members of the secular hierarchy administered the Eucharist. However, as discussed above, both Leo X and Adrian VI's bulls gave this right to the mendicants. To understand why this was such a contentious issue, it is necessary to briefly outline how the Eucharist was perceived in the sixteenth century. Beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the congregant was no longer permitted to regularly partake of communion, but was instead encouraged to venerate the host, because the host was an object capable of bringing about healing and grace. The priest's communion, which replaced individual communion, was intended to stand-in for the congregation as a whole.[41]

In a sixteenth-century New Spanish context, the celebrant's communion was particularly significant because it would allow for indigenous participation without actual physical participation. This would reinforce a dominant ideology of Christian power over a passive native, in order to ensure that prehispanic beliefs did not resurface. During this period, there was an active debate, among all levels of the New Spanish church, as to whether natives were fully human and capable of receiving the sacraments. While there was no consensus among the mendicants, the Augustinian philosopher Alonso de la Veracruz was a primary champion of human rights for the natives and believed that they were in fact capable of partaking of the sacraments. If the Augustinian friars at Acolman were in agreement with fray Alonso, then the performance of the Eucharist at Acolman would have been intended for an indigenous congregation who would watch as the friar

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[41] Bernard J. Cooke. *The Distancing of God: The Ambiguity of Symbol in History and Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, 181-183.

performed the primary action. The seculars were not in uniform agreement about the ability of the natives to partake of communion either, but they resented that administering communion gave the friars control over the indigenous population. The seculars did all they could to remove this influence by designing laws to curtail the regulars.[42]

In response to criticism from the secular clergy, the mendicants wrote texts celebrating their achievements in New Spain and explicitly critiquing the corrupt secular clergy. For example, the Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas wrote in his 1542 *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* that the Spanish authorities and secular clergy had cruelly exploited the natives. In other texts, Las Casas advocated a society more conducive to Spanish settlement and peaceful native conversion, often with the active participation of the Dominicans.[43] What was most crucial for Las Casas was not better human rights for the natives, but creating a New Spanish society in which the Dominicans played a cardinal role.

Like Las Casas, the Franciscan Jerónimo de Mendieta stressed the role of the Franciscans in the church by recording an idealized history of New Spanish society under the control of the mendicants. In his 1570-1597 *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*, Mendieta relates the discovery of New Spain, the customs and conversion of the indigenous population, and the decline of the mendicant-led church by the corrupt secular clergy. He is quick to affirm that, although the proficient Franciscans were responsible for the

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[42] Martin Austin Nesvig. "The 'Indian Question' and the Question of Tlatelolco." in *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico*. ed. Martin Austin Nesvig. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006, 63-89. Nesvig does not discuss Acolman.

[43] Brading (1991), 59-66.

conversion of the natives, these same natives were still too childlike to be left under the control of the secular clergy.[44]

A consistent theme of both of these chronicles is that the mendicants were the most competent branch of the New Spanish church. Therefore, they should be allowed to retain their favored position as mendicants-cum-parish priests. As they claimed, it was urgent that they retain their status because, only as the indigenous population was watched and guided by the fatherly mendicants, would they retain their newfound faith in Catholic doctrine. Indeed, the mendicants were able to keep the natives from straying from their new religion because they (not the seculars) were propagating only the well-established and approved doctrines of the Roman Church. Therefore, the mendicants were the only legitimate proponents of the Roman Church in New Spain.

The Augustinians

The Augustinians were initially founded by St. Augustine (354-430), and consisted of small groups of hermits living under a variety of rules first composed by Augustine himself. Before 1256, when they were unified under one rule, the Augustinians consisted of several unrelated groups: the Williamites, the Bonites, the Brittinians, and several other groups in Tuscany. These groups were united in 1256 under

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[44] Brading (1991), 110-116.

Pope Alexander IV. However, by the early sixteenth century, a number of reform-minded factions (including those that supported the Reformation) had broken away from the dominant branch, and the Augustinians were divided between those who wished to pursue an active missionary life and those who desired to return to a more contemplative life. At this time, the majority of European Augustinians lived in Italy and only a small percentage were in Spain.[45] Therefore, establishing themselves in New Spain was perhaps a way to extend their influence.[46]

During the Augustinian Chapter of 1531 in Castille, the main branch of Augustinians decided to send representatives to New Spain for missionary work. Two years later, after receiving the necessary royal permissions, the first seven Augustinians, under the direction of Francisco de la Cruz, embarked for New Spain. Between 1533 and 1564, approximately 180 Spanish Augustinians arrived in New Spain. After 1564, that number decreased dramatically. In fact, between 1565 and 1596, we have record of only 29 Augustinians arriving. However, the decrease in the number of Spanish friars was more than compensated for by a growing population of creole mendicants. Of the three major mendicant orders, the Augustinians were most noted for their dedication to scholarly pursuits and enthusiasm for debating the finer points of theology. In New

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[45] Rubial García, 9-10; Max Heimbuche. 1910. "Hermits of St. Augustine." *The Catholic Encyclopedia* VII, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07281a.htm; William A. Christian. *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, 16.

[46] I am grateful to Stacie Widdifield for suggesting this.

Spain, they established a number of art and philosophy schools, including a major one in Mexico City.[47]

Until 1596, the New Spanish Augustinians were considered a subordinate unit to the main house in Castille. In 1596, however, twelve Spanish friars arrived in New Spain to establish their own province in Michoacán. The main Augustinian house in this province, dedicated to Nicolás de Tolentino, became a major center for this group of mendicants.[48] The Augustinians also had a major house in Mexico City and by the end of the sixteenth century, there were approximately 75 Augustinian *conventos* in New Spain.[49]

As briefly mentioned in the Introduction, Acolman was founded in 1539 during a Chapter Meeting in Mexico City. We know only a little about the sixteenth-century history of the *convento*. According to the 1580 *Relaciones Geográficas*, Philip II's survey of New Spain, twenty-four friars lived there, an unusually large number. Nineteen of these were actively engaged in education at its school.[50] While we do not know when this school was established, we do know that in 1570 it had sixteen pupils and was primarily a grammar school. Between 1605-1610, Acolman was also a school for art and

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[47] Rubial García, 11-13, 89; McAndrew, 36. Apparently, the monarch did not specifically ask the Augustinians to travel to New Spain. This was rather unusual.

[48] Rubial García, 14. After 1596, there were major power-struggles between the Augustinians associated with the main houses in Michoacán and Mexico City. The presence of creole mendicants was a source of conflict between these two houses, but is not something I will detail in this paper. See Rubial García, 91-107.

[49] McAndrew, 36. McAndrew uses the word "monastery," but he probably meant "*convento*."

[50] Nuttall, Zelia, ed. and trans. "Official reports on the towns of Tequizistlan, Tepechpan, Acolman, and San Juan Teotihuacan sent by Francisco de Castañeda to His Majesty, Philip II, and the Council of the Indies in 1580." *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology* 11 (1926): 82.

theology.[51] Acolman was not only a residence for the friars and a school. It was also a frequent meeting-place for the Augustinians. The Augustinians held chapters every three years to elect their provincial, the head of their order. Although these chapter meetings were primarily held at their headquarters in Mexico City, three were held at Acolman (1560, 1564, and 1581), more than at any other Augustinian location.[52]

There are at least two things about Acolman which tie it directly to the conflict between the secular and regular clergy. Popes Leo X and Adrian VI allowed the mendicants to buy and sell land, permission they did not have in Europe. Although the Crown outlawed this practice in 1560, the 1567 papal bull known as the *Etsi mendicantium ordines* restored these privileges. Under these laws, a number of Augustinian *conventos* purchased extensive property from which they collected rent. For example, in 1583 Acolman owned a mill and other income-producing properties. However, Acolman's property was taken away that very year because of a new law enforced by the archbishop. Regardless, by 1594 and 1595, Acolman once again owned extensive property including an estate with nine *caballerías de tierra* (approximately 952 acres) and several buildings in Acolman and Texcoco. From these properties, they collected considerable rent.[53] The fact that the Augustinians were still able to acquire

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[51] Rubial García, table 13, no page.

[52] Rubial García, 252-57.

[53] Rubial García, 197-98. See http://www.sizes.com/units/caballería.htm for conversion between *caballerías de tierra* and acres.

property, even after the archbishop outlawed the practice, indicates the relative ineffectiveness of some laws designed to limit the regulars.

Acolman's ties to the viceroy may have also been a source of conflict with the secular clergy. At Acolman, the frequent alliance between the regulars and the viceroy is indicated by the two plaques on the west facade thanking Viceroy Don Luis de Velasco for his support of Acolman. These plaques could be a reference to a 1553 royal *cédula* granting the viceroy, not the archbishop, ultimate jurisdiction over the establishment of new *conventos*. Because it curtailed the influence and authority of the archbishop, this contentious law was vigorously opposed by the bishops who vowed to disobey it in 1555.[54] The two plaques on Acolman's facade, I argue, could be an indirect acknowledgment of this law and of the support of the viceroy for the mendicant project. The friars at Acolman also had a favorable relationship with Viceroys Don Lorenzo Suárez de Mendoza Coruña (viceroy 1580-1583) and Don Gaspar de Zúñiga y Acevedo (viceroy 1595-1603). Both of them stayed at Acolman during their *entradas* from Veracruz to Mexico City.[55]

The three chapters held at Acolman, the conflicts between the friars at Acolman and the secular clergy, and the relationship with the viceroys indicate that Acolman was a principal site for the production of meaning within the context of the regular-secular controversies. The apse murals, with their hierarchical arrangement of church officials

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[54] Rubial García, 120-21.

[55] Luis Javier Cuesta Hernández. "Sobre el estilo arquitectónico en Claudio de Arciniega." *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 22 (2000): 67. The *entrada* was the spectacle-filled journey from Veracruz to Mexico City taken by a new viceroy upon arrival in New Spain.

culminating in friars and headed by St. Augustine, are tied to the imagined New Spanish hierarchy the friars saw themselves belonging to. Like the church hierarchy established by Charles V, the hierarchy in the murals is a vision of an ideal church that did not exist in practice. By picturing an ideal hierarchy, these murals were a mendicant response to the objectionable hierarchy of the secular clergy. In the following section, I will date these murals to 1591-1620, a period in which the mendicants were trying to preserve their threatened position in the church.

Dating the Apse Murals

Before presenting my own argument for the dating of the apse murals, I will first survey the evidence for dating within the structure itself, and then how scholars have created a chronology for Acolman in the colonial period. Within Acolman itself, there are several key pieces of textual evidence that reveal information about the history and construction of the church. On both the left and right sides of the lower west facade, there are two engraved plaques. The left plaque inscription translates as: "This work was finished in 1560, during the reign of Philip, our Lord, son of the Emperor Charles V."[56] The right inscription translates roughly as: "this structure was built with the favor of and

[56] "Acadbóse esta obra año de 1560, reinando el Rey don Felipe Nuestro Señor, hijo del emperador Carlos V." My translation.

under the government of Viceroy Luis Velasco."[57] On the west side of the *arco del coro*, there is another inscription which has been translated as "This Church was restored on April 1, 1735; the Provincial was our most reverend Father and Master, Fr. Miguel de Ilarregui, and the prior of this convent our Priest and Preacher, Dr. Miguel de Amézaga."[58] Finally, there is a partially obscured inscription on the north-side Corinthian column (in the apse) which includes the date 1558. However, this Corinthian pilaster may date from an eighteenth-century restoration.[59]

The inscription on the Corinthian column, combined with the ones on the exterior plaques, indicate that construction of the church began in or before 1558 and was completed by 1560. Furthermore, the inscription on the *arco del coro* refers to a restoration in 1735. These three dates are all we can discern from the inscriptions in the structure itself. Since we do not have any surviving documents connected with the original construction, our primary source for the sixteenth-century history of the *convento* is Juan de Grijalva's 1624 account of the Augustinians in New Spain.[60]

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[57] "y gobernando en esta Nueva España su Illo. Virrey don Luis de Velasco, con cuyo favor se hedificó." My translation.

[58] *Acolman: Official Guide.* México: INAH, 1959, 13-14. This is the only full transcription I have found of this inscription. Since I have not seen the original text, I cannot verify the accuracy of the transcription.

[59] Although we have no original documents verifying the date of the Corinthian pilasters, their distinct style (particularly that they appear superimposed onto the original Doric columns) and different height could indicate a later modification. This claim is made in *Acolman: Official Guide*, 14-15. On the left pilaster, there is a plaque dating the interior of the church to 1558. If these pilasters really do date from the eighteenth century, the authenticity of this plaque is thrown into question.

[60] Juan de Grijalva. *Croníca de la Orden de n.p.s. Augustin en las prouincias de la Nueva España.* ed. Federico Goméz de Orozco. México: Imprenta Victoria, 1924.

Based on Grijalva's account, other unknown sources, and the inscriptions in the church, art historian José Montes de Oca composed the following history of Acolman. In 1524, the Franciscans, who first occupied Acolman, constructed some sort of early church under Fray Andrés de Olmos. By 1539, however, the Augustinians had control of the area, and began the construction of their own church and monastery.[61] I do not believe this early Franciscan presence can be verified by either sixteenth-century documents or Grijalva's account, and I do not know where Montes de Oca obtained this information.[62] In 1560, the Augustinians finished the church, as attested by the plaque on the facade. On April 1, 1735, the friars finished a renovation of the church, a conclusion derived solely from the inscription on the *arco del coro*.[63] Another restoration was completed in 1840, and I do not know where Montes de Oca obtained this information.[64] Although he does not cite his sources and a number of his assertions are problematic, Montes de Oca's history of the *convento* appears to have been adopted by all subsequent scholars, except for Luis Javier Cuesta Hernández and George Kubler.

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[61] Montes de Oca, 21.

[62] Other scholars in the 1920s attributed the small cloister to the Franciscans, although they do not cite any source for this. See for example, Antonio Cortés and Ignacio Marquinu. *Excursión al exconvento de San Agustín Acolman, 14 de diciembre de 1924*. México: Dirección Editorial de la Secretaria de Educación Pública, 1925, 24. Some scholars today still assert an early Franciscan presence. See for example, James Early. *The Colonial Architecture of Mexico*. Dallas: Southern Methodist U, 2001, 27. Interestingly, in the city of Acolman today and just up the road from the *convento*, there is a monumental statue of a Franciscan friar, perhaps a reference to the alleged early Franciscan presence in Acolman.

[63] Montes de Oca, 21. Although we have no documents connected with these renovations, and Montes de Oca does not provide further details about them, a series of guidebooks published by INAH throughout the twentieth-century contain the following information: in 1735, the friars began a large-scale renovation of the church, replacing portions of the original roof with the present barrel-vault. This new vault required the alteration of exterior supports and the construction of interior supports to hold up the ribbed vaulting in the apse. See for example, *Acolman: Official Guide,* 13-15.

[64] Montes de Oca, 24.

In his 2000 article "Sobre el estilo arquitectónico en Claudio de Arciniega," art historian Cuesta Hernández argues that Viceroy Luis de Velasco commissioned Claudio de Arciniega to design Acolman's church.[65] To prove this, the author largely employs circumstantial evidence such as Arciniega's presence in Seville before moving to New Spain, and his other projects for the viceroy, such as the Tomb for Charles V.[66] Although he expresses doubts about chronology, Cuesta Hernández compares various structural details of Acolman with similar ones at the Augustinian establishments in Actopan and Metztitlán, concluding that Arciniega was involved in the designs for these churches after completing Acolman. While some details of the three churches are almost identical, such as ribbed vaulting over the presbytery, many others are dissimilar. Regardless of similarities, accurate attributions to Actopan's and Metztitlán's architect, on the basis of stylistic analysis alone, exist only in the realm of speculation. It is just as likely that another architect emulated Acolman when designing Actopan or Metztitlán.[67]

George Kubler is the only scholar I am aware of who disagrees with the completion date of the church. Without explaining further, he writes: "In 1571, the *convento* was finished, and the church was still under construction."[68] Although Kubler posits a later date for the completion of the church, he does not subsequently posit a later date for the completion of the apse murals. In fact, with only one exception, all scholars I

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[65] Cuesta Hernández, 61-88.

[66] Some elements on Acolman's facade appear to derive from the Cathedral of Seville.

[67] For more on the problems with attributing stylistic similarities to these facades, see Reyes-Valerio, 242-260.

[68] Kubler, 503.

surveyed either did not assign a date, or assumed that the apse murals were completed around 1560, the probable date in which the church was also completed. The one scholar who apparently disagrees with this assumption is John McAndrew. In the caption under his image of the nave at Acolman, McAndrew writes that the apse murals "were painted a generation later..." Unfortunately, McAndrew does not clarify what he means by this statement.[69]

Peterson writes that most *convento* murals were painted between 1535 and 1585.[70] Since Acolman's church was completed in 1560, one could assume that the apse murals date from 1560 to 1585. However, there are some puzzling details in the murals which imply a later completion date. One of these details is the particular hats worn by the cardinals on the north wall. If the figures on the apse are all Augustinians, they could not have worn the cardinal's hat until after 1591, the year in which Pope Gregory XIV authorized them to.[71]

The most unexpected detail in this cycle is the papal tiara on the figure identified as Augustine. As will be discussed in detail in the final chapter, it was not part of Augustine's iconography in the sixteenth century to wear a papal tiara.[72] However,

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[69] McAndew, 136.

[70] Peterson, 2.

[71] Johannes Baptist Sägmüller. 1908. "Cardinal." *The Catholic Encyclopedia* III, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03333b.htm

[72] See for example, Jeanne Courcelle and Pierre Courcelle. *Iconographie de Saint Augustin: les cycles du XIV siècle*. Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1965; George Kaftal. *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting*. Florence: Sansoni, 1952; Mercedes Rochelle. *Post-Biblical Saints Art Index*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1989; Héctor H. Schenone. *Iconografía del arte colonial: los santos* vol. I. Argentina: Fundación Tarea, 1992.

beginning in the early seventeenth century, Augustine more frequently appears in images either wearing, or being crowned with, a tiara.[73] This implies that by this time, the tiara was a marker of status not just reserved for those who were technically authorized to wear it.

The inclusion of Augustine wearing a tiara raises crucial questions in relation to the dating of Acolman's apse murals. Four possibilities emerge: the artist took artistic liberty when painting the tiara on Augustine's head, particularly if he wished to preserve the overall scheme; the tiara was painted at a later date; the inscription next to Augustine is not actually intended to identify the figure as Augustine; the murals were painted in the early seventeenth century. I would like to propose that the murals were completed sometime between 1591 and 1620. We have evidence that nave murals in other mission churches were completed during this period. For example, the walls of the Franciscan mission church in Cuernavaca are covered with scenes detailing Franciscan missionary work in Japan, a territory they did not even enter until 1593. Also, Estrada de Gerlero has dated the nave murals in Huejotzingo to 1582-1640.[74] A 1591-1620 date for Acolman's murals would account for both the cardinals' hats the papal tiara on Augustine.

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[73] See for example Jeanne Courcelle and Pierre Courcelle. *Iconographie de Saint Augustin: les cycles du XVIe et du XVIIe siècle.* Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1972, plate LXVI.

[74] Elena Estrada de Gerlero. "El programa pasionario en el convento franciscano de Huejotzingo." *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 20 (1983): 655.

CHAPTER 2

ACOLMAN AS ART HISTORICAL OBJECT

"Acolman es tipo perfecto de las iglesias agustinianas de mediados del siglo XVI..."[75]

Since its construction between 1539 and 1560, many writers and scholars have portrayed Acolman as a structure divorced from its original sixteenth-century context. In the words of these writers, Acolman takes on a new identity more appropriate to the time in which the author is writing. This is particularly evident in the way the apse murals have been addressed. In this chapter, I discuss how writers and scholars have responded to the apse murals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In particular, the years between 1894-1929 were crucial in fashioning subsequent scholarship.

In 1830, Acolman's secular curate Juan Bautista Velasco wrote an account of his clerical activities at various parishes.[76] He opens his account of Acolman by describing structural improvements initiated by his predecessors. One such improvement was the whitewashing of the apse. He writes: "The presbytery was whitewashed and painted."[77] With these brief words, Velasco demarcates the colonial history of the building by making it useless to the early nineteenth century.[78] While Velasco does not divulge

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[75] Manuel Toussaint. "La arquitectura religiosa en la Nueva España durante el siglo XVI." in *Iglesias de México* vol. 6. ed. Dr. Atl and José R. Benítez. México: Secrataría de Hacienda, 1927, 35.

[76] Acolman was secularized in 1754 as mandated by the Spanish Crown. See Gibson, 107.

[77] *"Se blanqueó y pintó el presbiterio."* Juan Bautisa Velasco. *Relación de méritos del bachiller D. Juan Bautista Velasco, acutal encargado del curato de Acolman, opositor al presente concurso*. México: Galvan a cargo de Mariano Arevalo, 1830, 10.

[78] I am grateful to Dr. Stacie Widdifield for clarifying this.

further details about this whitewashing, it was likely intended to cover the eighteenth-century murals which, according to at least one scholar, once filled the nave.[79] There will be a fuller discussion of the whitewashing process below. Many early nineteenth-century intellectuals shared Velasco's indifference toward colonial history. In this immediate post-Independence era, colonial architecture was considered a reminder, particularly by the state, of the colonial past.[80] The church took an ambivalent position toward Independence,[81] and perhaps Velasco's exclusion of part of Acolman's sixteenth-century history from the nave reflects his view of the church as a symbol of the newly independent nation.

Although to early nineteenth-century intellectuals, colonial architecture was symbolic of the repressive colonial era, by mid century, some intellectuals were urging a reconsideration of colonial buildings as sites of national patrimony. Issues of national patrimony first became a concern in the mid nineteenth century with the destruction of colonial monuments in Mexico City to make way for redevelopment. In particular, the 1861 Laws of Suppression allowed the state to confiscate some religious buildings for the construction and improvement of roads. Mid and late nineteenth-century developers

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[79] For a brief mention of these eighteenth-century murals, see Manuel Romero de Terreros. "La Iglesia y Monasterio de San Agustín Acolman, en Méjico." Raza Español 2 no. 15-16 (1920): 84-87. The author cites Alfonso Toro. "En el silencio del viejo convento." *Revista de Revistas*. (January 1919). I was unable to obtain this article.

[80] Annick Lempérière. "La Ciudad de México, 1780-1860: del espacio barroco al espacio republicano." in: *Hacia otra historia del arte en México: De la estructuración colonial a la exigencia nacional (1780-1860)* ed. Esther Acevedo. Mexico City: Consejo Nacional, 2001, 149-164.

[81] Brian Francis Connaughton Hanley. *Clerical Ideology in a Revolutionary Age: The Guadalajara Church and the Idea of the Mexican Nation, 1788-1853*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003. 111-113.

envisioned a Mexico City clear of the elaborate colonial buildings hindering the progress of the state.

The mid nineteenth-century work by the painter José María Velasco (1840-1912) is symptomatic of a burgeoning intellectual backlash against the destruction of colonial monuments. In the same year as the Laws of Suppression, he painted *Ex-convento de San Bernardo,* an image of a seventeenth-century Conceptionist convent in ruins. Since this convent had been partially torn down to make way for a new street, Velasco's painting of this building as a ruin is a poignant reminder of the destruction caused by the modernization of the city. In the following year, he painted *Patio del ex-convento de San Agustín*. This painting features the convent of San Agustín, not as a ruin, but as a fully-functioning structure removed from its mid nineteenth-century context. While in the image of San Bernardo, Velasco highlights the plight suffered by the building in the modern era by transforming it into a ruin, his image of San Agustín is a nostalgic reminder of what is now lost by recreating an idealized vision of the past.[82]

Acolman underwent a similar transformation in the late nineteenth century. As discussed above, 1830 curate Juan Bautista Velasco essentially made Acolman's history inconsequential by whitewashing the nave. Sixty-four years later, another curate of Acolman initiated the transformation of the building from a functioning church existing only in the present, to an historic monument of national significance. It is only

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[82] Stacie G. Widdifield. "Modernizando el pasado: la recuperación del arte y su historia, 1860-1920." in *Hacia otra historia del arte en México: La amplitud del modernismo y la modernidad*. ed. Stacie G. Widdifield. Mexico City: Consejo Nacional, 2004, 81-89.

appropriate that this transformation began with the uncovering of the apse murals in 1894. According to unverified accounts by the architects Antonio Cortés and Ignacio Marquinu, the apse murals were first uncovered in 1894 under the direction of the current parish priest, Eduardo Pineda. With the financial backing of a certain Rómulo Escudero, the whitewash was removed in 1895.[83]

Unfortunately, further details surrounding the late nineteenth-century uncovering of the apse murals have not been published. However, the uncovering can be linked to contemporary debates surrounding the modernization of the country and the loss of national patrimony. By 1894, the attitude of some intellectuals toward colonial buildings was shifting from a perception of these buildings as worthless reminders of a past best forgotten, to structures which now needed preservation because of their historic value to the nation. In particular, they were symbolic of a time before rapid modernization.[84] The removal of whitewash at Acolman, therefore, occurs at a particular moment in which many intellectuals had transformed colonial buildings into emblems of a movement opposing the modernization of society.

When describing the uncovering of the apse murals, Cortés and Marquinu write that the removal of whitewash was necessary in order to "save" the murals.[85] For these two authors, writing in the early 1920s, these sixteenth-century murals needed

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[83] Cortés and Marquinu, 17. According to this source, Pineda was parish priest from November 19, 1891-January 17, 1901. The authors do not cite any source for this information, and I have not found any other mention of it.

[84] Widdifield, 69-98.

[85] *"Descubierta, se dió principio, desde luego, a salvarla, a expensas del señor don Romulo Escudero..."* Cortés and Marquinu, 17.

preservation for future generations because the future required the past.[86] In fact, the early 1920s witnessed the first large-scale historic preservation movement in Mexico. For the first time, a centralized government agency, the *Inspección de Monumentos Artísticos e Históricos de la Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público*, attempted to catalog and document colonial buildings. This organization also formulated a set of standardized restoration practices and encouraged scientific and archeological investigation prior to beginning any project.[87] In 1920, this organization took ownership of Acolman, an act which can be connected to the Constitution of 1917's regulations limiting the power and influence of the church.

Between 1920 and 1927, the *Secretaría de Hacienda* embarked on a major restoration of Acolman. By that time, most of the monastery was in ruins and the church also in disrepair. The restorers removed two meters of accumulated silt off the floor of the entire structure, discovered and began to unearth the smaller cloister, and removed the whitewash from areas of the cloister murals.[88] Although there are no published records of restorations of the apse murals in the 1920s, they appear to have been altered in one of

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[86] I am grateful to Stacie Widdifield for clarifying this.

[87] Sonia Lombardo de Ruiz. "El Patrimonio arquitectónico y urbano (de 1521 a 1900)." in *El Patimonio Nacional de México.* ed. Enrique Florescano. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997, 198-238.

[88] For more on restorations of Acolman in the 1920s, see Jaime Ortiz Lajous. *San Agustín de Acolman*. México: Teléfonos de México, 1990, 118-120; Cortés and Marquinu, 26-27.

the other major restoration projects of the twentieth century.[89] Without access to primary sources, I am unable to determine the impacts of these restorations on the murals.

The 1920s restoration of Acolman was framed by a post-Revolutionary desire to preserve a colonial building as a high-quality art object for the future. This is evident in a postscript added by the *Secretaría de Hacienda* to Cortés' book. According to this postscript, the *Secretaría de Hacienda* was disturbed when they learned of new "repairs affecting the artistic character of the edifice."[90] In addition, they were concerned about the damage to the building from major floods. In response, they ordered the detrimental repairs to cease and instead embarked on their own restoration, as detailed above. Significantly, the authors of this text do not once comment on Acolman's sixteenth-century function and use. Instead, Acolman had become a work of art in need of restoration.

The *Secretaría de Hacienda* was not intent upon reviving or recreating a sixteenth-century history of Acolman. Instead, they wished to preserve the *convento* as a nonfunctional art object. The *Secretaría de Hacienda's* attitude was echoed by art historians who wrote short articles or monographs on Acolman in the 1920s.[91] All of

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[89] In 1963, INAH began restoring the nave, but there is no published indication that they restored the apse murals. See Carlos Flores Marini. "Obras de restauración en el convento de San Agustín Acolman." *Boletín del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia* 14 (December 1963): 17-18. Other twentieth-century restorations include one directed by Manuel Toussaint in the early 1950s and one in 1985. I do not have information about the extent of those particular restorations.

[90] *"El 21 de marzo de 1919, recibió aviso la Inspección de monumentos Artísticos, que en la Iglesia y Ex-Convento de San Agustín Acolman se emprendían obras de reparación que afectaban el carácter artístico del edificio..."* Cortés and Marquinu, 26.

[91] Some of these articles are listed in the References.

these scholars, including Cortés and Marquinu, Manuel Romero de Tererros, José Montes de Oca, and Manuel Toussaint, considered Acolman to be one of, if not *the* most exceptional colonial church from sixteenth-century Mexico. This is indicated by the opening words to Cortés and Marquinu's monograph: "Of all these churches [in the Teotihuacan Valley], without a doubt the most important is that of Saint Augustine, but its importance is not only local. It would be difficult to find a contemporaneous example, anywhere in the Republic, as interesting as this one."[92] However, Acolman was not so "important" because of its use by the Augustinians in the sixteenth century, but because it was the premier example of the Plateresque style in New Spain.[93] For example, Toussaint devotes nearly his entire section on Acolman in Dr. Atl's *Iglesias de México* to praising the facade and the Renaissance-style large cloister. He focuses on these two areas of the *convento* because they are "exceptional...of pure European style."[94]

Since Acolman had been defined by its facade, the canonical example of the Plateresque, there was no need to investigate the apse murals. For instance, despite Toussaint's lengthy description of the facade, he reserves only one phrase for the apse murals. They seem to be more of an afterthought for him.[95] Toussaint, along with other art historians writing in the 1920s, perceived sixteenth-century *conventos* to be

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[92] *"De todas estas iglesias, sin duda la más importante es la de San Agustín, cuya importancia no es solamente local, pues difícilmente es encuentra en la República un ejemplar de la época, tan interestante como éste."* Cortés and Marquinu, 5.

[93] Without exception, all of these early scholars understood the facade to be high-quality work by European designers and artists.

[94] *"Deben estudiarse con especial cuidado el claustro y la portada, obras excepcionales en México, de puro estilo europeo."* Toussaint, 35.

[95] Toussaint, 35.

fragmented by artistic medium and style. Painting, sculpture, and architecture did not work together in one coherent program based on the issues confronting sixteenth-century mendicants. Rather, architecture, particularly European-style architecture, was primary. Therefore, painting and the so-called minor arts were secondary.

The assessment of the apse murals as secondary to the facade, was perpetuated throughout the twentieth century in a number of guidebooks published by INAH and several richly-illustrated monographs.[96] For example, in his 1990 book on Acolman, Jaime Ortiz Lajous devotes five pages to describing the facade and speculating on the identity of the architect. On the other hand, he devotes only one brief paragraph of description to the apse murals. For Ortiz Lajous, Acolman is best characterized by its architecture rather than its painting.[97]

The scholars examined so far worked within a particular discourse that transformed Acolman, a sixteenth-century Augustinian mission church, into an exquisite example of sixteenth-century art. They were art historians establishing or working from a canon of colonial art that placed Mexican art within the predominant European art historical discourse. Other writers, generally Americans, framed Acolman in a different discourse. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, many Americans toured Mexico because they saw it as an authentic culture, unencumbered by the technological advances of modern society.

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[96] See for example, P. Calders. *Acolman: un convento agustino del siglo XVI*. México: Editorial Atlante, 1945; *Acolman: Official Guide.* México: INAH, 1959.

[97] Ortiz Lajous, 101-112; 80. Notably, Ortiz Lajous is one of only a few scholars who suggest that the architect may have been an indigenous member of the community.

These Americans believed that since Mexico was a primitive culture, authentic Mexican art, particularly picturesque folk art, must also be primitive.[98] The American Jessie L. Rau provided a typical response to Mexican art in her 1934 travelogue. Her primary argument is that the muted colors and primitive art she saw in Mexico reflected the sedate and primitive souls of the inhabitants. Her account of Acolman is telling in this regard. What Rau praises about Acolman is not its Plateresque facade or cloister, but the architectural elements which best illustrate her ideal of a pure and rustic Mexican culture. For instance, she notes that the altar was "plain, almost rude..." and that peasants were kneeling on a dirt floor humbly praying to a saint.[99] For Rau, these meek peasants were the authentic soul of Mexico because they were still continuing their simple religious devotions in a pre-industrial church.

Whether they were Americans searching for authenticity or Mexican art historians trying to qualify colonial art as worthy of the canon, writers and scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were not particularly heedful of Acolman's sixteenth-century history. These same writers and art historians did not allow the apse murals to exist in the context of sixteenth-century political and social conditions. Instead, the murals were secondary to whatever they thought best defined sixteenth-century art. As I will detail in the following chapter, murals in sixteenth-century *conventos* were never just

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[98] See for example, James Oles. "For Business or Pleasure: Exhibiting Mexican Folk Art, 1820-1930." in *Casa Mañana*. ed. Susan Danly. Albuquerque: University of New México, 2002, 11-29.

[99] Jessie L Rau. "Mexico in Minor Key." *Hispania* 15 (March 1932), 154-5. The way Rau twists the facts about Acolman is especially interesting. For instance, as indicated by early photographs, the floor was wooden in the 1930s, and the altar was a typical stone table in front of an elaborate eighteenth-century retablo.

incidental or secondary to the architecture surrounding them. Rather, murals were tied to a comprehensive program of mendicant art.

CHAPTER 3

LOCATION AND HIERARCHY IN MENDICANT ART

In this chapter, I elaborate on three characteristics of late sixteenth-century mendicant art: its pertinence within a local context, its location within the *convento,* and its physical arrangement. I begin by exploring how the nave murals in the mission churches of Ixmiquilpan and Huejotzingo present local issues. In the second half of this chapter, I consider the organization of retablos and the role of the apostles and prophets at their base. The implications of all three of these characteristics will shape my analysis of Acolman's apse murals in the next chapter.

On the north wall of the nave in the sixteenth-century Franciscan mission church of Huejotzingo, there are murals of hooded figures processing with symbols of Christ's Passion. These murals (dated 1582-1640) likely represent real-life Holy Week processions sponsored by a local confraternity. These elaborate processions were an opportunity to reenact the Passion as an act of penance and began with a descent from the cross. As Webster argues, the real-life penitents at Huejotzingo would have used the nave murals as visual cues by beginning their own procession at the mural of the Descent from the Cross on the north wall. Therefore, the art in the nave was not only a record of these processions, but also visual referents for the real-life penitents at Huejotzingo.[100]

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[100] Webster, 34, 36.

The nave murals in Huejotzingo chronicle local ritual activities. The local population would have also identified with the nave murals (dated 1569-1572) in the Augustinian *convento* of Ixmiquilpan. In the lower register of the north and south walls in the nave, there are large-scale murals of indigenous warriors battling mythological creatures. Pierce has identified the warriors as the Otomí and Chichimecs. The Otomí were allies of the Spanish and quickly adopted Christianity. The Chichimecs, on the other hand, resisted the Spanish and refused to convert. In the Ixmiquilpan murals, these two groups are pitted against each other, possibly in an allegorical battle between good and evil. Therefore, the nave murals at Ixmiquilpan are an allegory of good over evil elucidated for the local indigenous population by allusion to a real-life conflict.[101]

The emphasis in this chapter so far has been on how the mendicants incorporated local New Spanish issues into their art. In Ixmiquilpan's nave, a New Spanish conflict between the Otomí and Chichimecs becomes an allegorical conflict between good and evil. At Huejotzingo, the ritual activities of a confraternity are immortalized in the very space they occurred. The location of these two sets of murals is crucial because it indicates that contemporary local issues sometimes determined the content of nave murals. Like the murals in these two mendicant establishments, the apse murals at Acolman also exist within the space of the church itself. Furthermore, these murals are tied directly to a local issue. Since the pertinence of Acolman's murals is clarified by

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[101] Estrada de Gerlero (1976), 9-19; Pierce, 1-8.

their hierarchical arrangement, for the remainder of this chapter I will consider how hierarchy is typically delineated in sixteenth-century mendicant art.

Relationships of Power in Mendicant Art

In medieval and Renaissance imagery, a religious figure located below other religious figures or events served as the foundation of that which was above. This is exemplified by a schematized visualization of ecclesiastical history known as a retablo. Originating in Spain and Italy, retablos in New Spain are multistory altarpieces that present and order relationships of power across time. They contain statues of saints and paintings of Biblical scenes. At the base, there are relief sculptures or paintings of the twelve apostles, Old Testament prophets, or the four Doctors of the Church.[102]

There are only a few surviving sixteenth-century New Spanish retablos. One of these is the 1586 example in Huejotzingo. This retablo was commissioned by the native elite in Huejotzingo, and completed by Flemish painter Simon Pereyns and Spanish sculptors Pedro de Requeña and Andrés de Concha. The retablo is divided into four horizontal levels by a gilded wooden frame. In the body of the retablo, paintings

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[102] For more on retablos including the significance of the base figures, see for example, Monica Herrerias de la Fuente. *El Retablo de la Iglesia Conventual de Xochimilco*. Churubusco, México: Escuela Nacional de Conservacion, Restauracion y Museografia, 1979; Armando Ruiz, ed. *Los retablos de la Ciudad de México: siglos XVI y XVII.* México: Asociación del Patrimonio Artístico Mexicano, 2005; Judith Berg Sobré. *Behind the Altar Table, The Development of the Painted Retable in Spain, 1350-1500*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989;

detailing the life of Christ alternate with sculptures of saints. At its base, the twelve apostles are carved in relief.[103] Although the Huejotzingo retablo is not organized hierarchically like Acolman's apse murals, the base figures serve a substantial role within the overall scheme. In short, their status as the first Christian saints is made tangible through a visual device. Their hierarchy within the Church is conflated with their sculpted location at the base of the retablo. This location implies a two-pronged connotation. First, what these apostles support ensures that their own writings and thoughts become relevant to the Christian. Second, the rank of the apostles in the Church is validated by the actions of the saints who came after.

The connotations attached to the location of base figures in retablos indicate that, in general, the location of particular figures within a work of art was not accidental. Furthermore, just as the nave murals in Huejotzingo exist in a space intimately tied to their function in a liturgical context, the location of other mendicant art in its physical space was part of a carefully-planned program. As I will argue in the following chapter, the physical location of the apse murals within Acolman was intentional, and the arrangement of figures within these murals was determined by a hierarchical scheme tied directly to the issues confronting the New Spanish mendicants in the late sixteenth century.

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[103] Heinrich Berlin, Pedro de Carvajal and Cristobal Gutierrez. "The High Altar of Huejotzingo." *The Americas* 15:1 (Jul. 1958): 63-73. This article reproduces the original contracts for the retablo.

CHAPTER 4

AUGUSTINIANS AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE ROMAN CHURCH IN NEW SPAIN

This chapter will utilize the conceptual and spatial issues introduced in the last chapter to interpret Acolman's apse murals as an Augustinian response to conflicts between the regular and secular clergy. Specifically, this chapter will examine the hierarchical relationships of power within the murals, focusing on why there is a row of three Augustinian friars below the cardinals on the north wall and the bishops on the south wall. Today, these friars are mostly obscured. However, what is still visible indicates that they were also seated on the same thrones as the other figures in the cycle.

Art historian Francisco de la Maza has characterized the popes, cardinals, and bishops in Acolman's apse as an allegorical representation of the Church, that body which contains and propagates messianic truth as interpreted by Church Fathers and saints. In particular, he claims that the open and closed books held by the figures indicate their identity as prophets of the Second Coming.[104] He does not expand further on what he means or on the implications of his assertion in a sixteenth-century New Spanish context. I also assert that the apse murals are an allegory of the Church as keeper of truth. We know that this symbolic equation between groups of holy individuals and the Church was familiar to the New Spanish mendicants because the sixteenth-century Franciscan Toribia

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[104] Maza, 43.

Motolinía characterized a mural of popes, bishops, and cardinals in a now-lost Franciscan chapel as the Church. He writes: "Elsewhere in the chapel is a picture of the Church, His Holiness, the Pope, cardinals, bishops and so on; and next to it a picture of the Emperor, kings and knights."[105] For Motolinía, a mural of cardinals, bishops, and popes (perhaps similar in appearance to Acolman's apse murals) symbolized the Church. Unfortunately, this mural, probably located in Tlaxcala, is now lost and archeologists have been unable to discover its location.[106]

The iconographic and organizational sources for the allegorical Church at Acolman appear to derive from the Sistine Chapel in Rome.[107] The Sistine Chapel was constructed between 1475 and 1483 under Pope Sixtus IV. On the walls of the interior, there are three horizontal levels containing images of Christian history. Along the lowest level, there were once tapestries by Raphael detailing the lives of Sts. Peter and Paul. In the middle level, there are scenes from the life of Christ on the north wall, and scenes from the life of Moses on the south wall. The artists of these scenes were Domenico Ghirlandaio, Sandro Botticelli, Pietro Perugino and Cosimo Roselli. In the upper tier, there is a row of popes, also painted by these artists during the 1480s. These popes stand in their own niches and are topped by prophets and sibyls in the lunettes. These prophets

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[105] As quoted in Edgerton, 184. This quote is from *Historía de los Indios de la Nueva España.*

[106] Edgerton, 183.

[107] Mention of the stylistic similarities between Acolman's apse murals and the Sistine Chapel Ceiling is in nearly all the literature on the murals. However, no scholar has yet investigated how or why the friars would have chosen such a model. See for example, Montes de Oca, 25.

and sibyls were painted by Michelangelo between 1508-12 and are part of his chronological representation of Old Testament events on the ceiling.

There are iconographic and organizational similarities between the Sistine Chapel and Acolman's apse murals. Both the murals at Acolman and the images on the north and south walls of the Sistine Chapel are divided into three horizontal tiers, with a row of popes in the upper tier, topped by ancestors of Christ in the lunettes.[108] Like the figures in the Sistine Chapel, the prophets and sibyls at Acolman dramatically twist their elongated bodies and hold scrolls from which they read. Acolman's walls also once had six *ignudi*, of which four remain, in the center of each wall between the popes. These may have been derived from the *ignudi* on Michelangelo's ceiling.

The designer of Acolman's murals would have accessed the decoration of the Sistine chapel through books of European prints circulating in New Spain during the sixteenth century.[109] Many *convento* murals were designed from these prints and this practice has traditionally led some scholars to conclude that the images were just copies and that the style derived from prints did not hold a particular meaning for a New Spanish audience.[110] Conversely, murals which do not seem to follow a direct European model have received the majority of scholarly attention in recent years because of their intriguing synthesis of European and indigenous traditions. The 1571-1585 cloister

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[108] At Acolman, there are saints, prophets, and sibyls in the lunettes, and in the Sistine Chapel, there are just ancestors of Christ in that place. However, like Acolman's murals, Michelangelo's ceiling is also framed by prophets and sibyls.

[109] For more on this, see Peterson, 65-77.

[110] See for example: Martin S. Soria. "Notes on Early Murals in Mexico." Studies in the Renaissance vol. 6 (1959): 240.

murals at Malinalco are one example. Regarding this cycle, Peterson has argued that the combination of both European and indigenous iconography created different meanings for indigenous and European audiences.[111]

I also assert that Acolman's apse murals, although based on the style and organization of the murals in the Sistine Chapel, held a unique meaning for a New Spanish audience. As I discussed in the Introduction however, I am not trying to recover that lost meaning. Rather, I am exploring the image these murals would have presented to a mendicant audience. I argue that the similarities to the Sistine Chapel connote all the influence and power of the pope himself. The allegorical Church at Acolman, therefore, is more than just an allegory for the Church as keeper of truth. It is emblematic of St. Peter's in the Vatican, carrying with it all the power of the pope.

The relevance of papal power to the Augustinians at Acolman is tied directly to the hierarchical arrangement of the murals. They are organized in a strict hierarchical fashion with the mendicants at the bottom, cardinals and bishops in the middle, and popes at the top level. The strict hierarchical arrangement presented in these murals is made more obvious by the repetitive nature of the composition. In total, the hierarchy of pope, bishop/cardinal, and friar is repeated six times.[112] Furthermore, three popes on the south wall are mirrored by three popes on the north wall, and four cardinals on the south wall are mirrored by four bishops on the north wall. Within each row, figures are dressed

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[111] Peterson, *The Paradise Garden Murals of Malinalco*.

[112] If not for the windows on the south and north walls (in place of the popes), this hierarchy would be repeated eight times.

identically, hold identical crosses, and are seated on identical thrones. While their facial features sometimes vary, most of the figures could easily be interchanged with one another.

The hierarchical arrangement of church officials in a large-scale composition recalls another category of art in sixteenth-century New Spain known as a retablo. As detailed in the previous chapter, retablos are altarpieces containing statues of saints and paintings of biblical events. At the base, there are apostles or prophets who serve as the foundation of the figures above. Like the prophets and apostles in a retablo, the mendicants in Acolman's apse murals are also located at the base of the cycle. Furthermore, both works of art are located in the apse, surrounding the altar. In consideration of the locational and organizational similarities between retablos and the apse murals, I propose to transfer the supporting role of the prophets in a retablo to the mendicants in the apse murals. I argue that the figures in the lowest level of the murals are also a foundation for the figures above them.

The friars in the murals serve in the same position as the base figures in a retablo. Therefore, they support the saints above, and at the same time, are validated by those individuals. More specifically, if the figures are identified as an allegory for St. Peter's, then the friars are the foundation of papal power in New Spain. They are what ensure the propagation of doctrine in New Spain as taught by the Roman Church. At the same time, the Roman Church validates their New Spanish work. As discussed in my first chapter, papal authorization gave the mendicants the right to act as parish priests without the

authorization of the bishop. This included Pope Leo X's brief on April 25, 1521, the *Exponi Nobis* released by Adrian VI on May 10, 1522, and the *Etsi mendicantium ordines* by Pope Pius V in 1567.

In a print in his 1579 Rhetorica Christiana, Diego Valadés envisages the same relationship between the Church and the Franciscans. Diego Valadés was a *mestizo* trained at Fray Pedro de Gante's school at *San José de los Naturales*, and later became a Franciscan friar. In 1571, he traveled for the first time to Europe. While in Italy, he published the Rhetorica Christiana.[113]

In his book, Valadés expounded on the role of language and art in teaching religious doctrine to neophytes, particularly the necessity for classical training and rhetoric. Although they conceptualized the natives as children and themselves as protective fatherly figures, some Franciscans also believed that the natives did have potential to learn Christian doctrine and even become ordained members of the church. In order for the indigenous population to reach their potential, however, they must be taught through a carefully-planned program of classical rhetoric. Therefore, in 1536, the Franciscans established the Colegio de Santa Cruz to indoctrinate natives through this method. From the moment of the college's inception, the Franciscans were criticized, by the secular hierarchy, for assuming that natives had the same intellectual capacity as

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[113] Edgerton, 114-16.

Europeans. The Rhetorica Christiana, therefore, was Valadés' attempt to prove the efficacy of the Franciscans' pedagogical tactics by writing for a European audience.[114]

Included in his book are several prints of friars instructing natives. One of these images, now referred to as the *Ideal Atrio*, appears to be both a frontal and bird's-eye view of an *atrio*, the large open space in front of a *convento*. Within this space, friars teach the sacraments to small groups of natives. In the center of the image, fourteen Franciscan friars carry a large structure.[115] Some scholars have noted that the design of the structure carried by the friars is similar to Bramante's design for the new St. Peter's in Rome, a design Valadés may have seen during his time in Italy.[116]

These fourteen Franciscans are holding the structure within the space of the *atrio*. To understand the significance of this location, it is necessary to consider the uses of the *atrio* in the sixteenth-century evangelization project.[117] The *atrio* was a large open space in front of sixteenth-century mendicant churches used by the friars to baptize and preach to large numbers of unconverted natives. Also used for processions and theatrical performances, the *atrio* was a central space for community life.[118]

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[114] Brading (1991), 102-127; Nesvig, 63-89; Santa Arias. "Profesando la preceptiva humanista: la poética y la política misionera en la *Retórica Cristiana* de Diego Valadés." *Mesoamerica* 23 (June 2002): 1-16.

[115] Only two of the friars carrying the structure are identified. St. Francis heads the group and Martín de Valenecia, the leader of the first twelve New Spanish Franciscans, is at the rear.

[116] See for example, Santiago Sebastián. *Iconografía del arte del siglo XVI en México*. (Zacatecas: Gobierno del Estado de Zacatecas, 1995), 27.

[117] Laura Elaine Leaper. *Documenting the Processes of Acculturation: Diego de Valades's Rhetorica Christiana.* MA Thesis, University of California, Riverside, 2005, 45-46.

[118] Beginning with George Kubler and John McAndrew, scholars have debated the origin and sources, both prehispanic and European, for the *atrio*. These sources could include the open plazas in front of early Christian basilicas and the courts in front of Aztec temples. For one interpretation, see Lara, 177-195.

Valadés' print of an ideal *atrio* therefore is an image of this vital community center and the center of early evangelization efforts in the New World. At the heart of this community center, Valadés stations a Christian church physically carried by Franciscans. Below the Franciscans is the following inscription: "First to bring the Holy Church of Rome to the New World of the Indies." In other words, the Franciscans are literally the first evangelizers in the Spanish colonies. At the same time, they were the most qualified, of all branches of the Church, to preach in New Spain.

Valadés makes it even clearer that the Franciscans are the most qualified to preach in New Spain by picturing small groups of natives taught the sacraments in the *atrio*. Significantly, these groups of figures radiate from the structure held by the friars. By picturing natives taught the sacraments emitting out of a structure similar to St. Peter's, Valadés highlights their papal-sanctioned legitimacy. Valadés refers to this sanction in the following passage:

> ...in order that it is understood with certainty that nothing is contained in this art, which the Church, the mother of truth, does not approve, does not teach, nothing which is not found in the holy books or the holy doctors, nothing which cannot at least be referred through a certain likeness to the interpretation of sacred books or to the sentences of the Fathers.[119]

In this passage, Valadés tries to convince his readers that the work of the Franciscans is legitimate because their teachings derive from the Church in Rome. Furthermore, they are bringing the Roman Church to New Spain with the approval of that

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[119] As quoted in Leaper, 47.

Church. The *Ideal Atrio*, therefore, is a powerful statement that the Church in Rome, represented by a model of Bramante's St. Peter's and supported by both contemporary and historical Franciscans, is now located at the center of religious life in New Spain.[120]

Although they are different mediums, Acolman's apse murals can be compared to the *Ideal Atrio*, because both the print and mural cycle present an image of the mendicants as still relevant, through association with St. Peter's, to the late sixteenth-century New Spanish church. Significantly, the allegorical Church at Acolman and the image of the Church in the print are both located in a New Spanish space. The Church in the print is located in the *atrio* and the allegorical Church at Acolman is, obviously, located in a New Spanish church, around the high altar.

It is significant that the mural cycle surrounds the high altar. The altar is the holiest area of the church because it is the site of the Eucharist. At Acolman, in the space used to perform the Eucharist, the sixteenth-century friars had an image of themselves as the foundation of the Church. Furthermore, this image of the Church alludes directly to the Sistine Chapel and contains six popes. These references to the pope would have reinforced claims by the mendicants that they were converting and ministering to the indigenous population with the permission of the pope. In particular, the location of these murals in the apse would have provided the Augustinians with much-needed papal sanction to perform the sacraments.

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[120] Leaper, 41-47.

Bishop or Pope? Augustine as Light of the Church

The figures below the prophets, saints, and sibyls in the apse murals can be identified as bishops, cardinals, popes, and friars because of their headgear and the type of cross they hold. However, identification of specific historical individuals is dubious because the figures are not labeled with text and they do not hold specific attributes. In sixteenth-century European and New Spanish art, it was customary to identify particular holy personages either through attributes or text. For example, in the chapter room of the Franciscan *convento* of Huejotzingo, there is a mural of twelve Franciscans kneeling in reverence before a cross. Each friar is clearly labeled with an inscription. At Acolman, it is conspicuous that only one figure is positively identified in the apse murals. That figure is St. Augustine. Not only is he the only one identified, but Augustine is further distinguished by his anomalous headgear, a tiara. In this section, I consider the function of Augustine within the mural cycle by evaluating his headgear as a pictorial device for conveying his preeminence.

As discussed in the first chapter, it was not part of Augustine's sixteenth-century iconography to picture him as a pope. Since he was the Bishop of Hippo and founder of a monastic order, it was standard before the seventeenth century to represent him as either a bishop with a mitre or monk with a tonsure.[121] For example, in his 1490 *St. Jerome and St. Augustine*, Italian artist Carlo Crivelli depicts him as a bishop wearing a mitre. While Crivelli paints Augustine as a bishop, the artist at Acolman paints him as a pope wearing

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[121] See note 71.

a tiara. At Acolman, therefore, the tiara must be something more than just a piece of headgear.

In late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century art, the tiara was a marker of status that carried with it all the associations of papal power. For example, in an 1587 print by Flemish artist Martín de Vos, Christ transfers the New World to Cortés. On the table between the two parties, there is a papal tiara next to a crown and scepter. In this image, the tiara is an emblem for St. Peter's. It is all that is needed to convey a papal presence in the image. Similarly, the tiara on Augustine's head carries with it all the connotations of papal power and influence. Augustine has been transformed into a bishop with the authority of a pope because of his appropriation of an object embodying all the authority of the pope.

Augustine is distinguished both by the papal tiara and the inscriptions beginning to the left of his throne and running through the cycle. When combined, all of the inscriptions can be roughly translated as "Augustine, light of the church, doctor emeritus, killer of heretics. You establish the holy rule for your saints. Through you we find and follow the road [of righteousness]. Your rule provides a solid architecture for us."[122] As implied by the inscriptions, Augustine's new status as pope molds him into a leader for the Augustinians at Acolman. Augustine's role as metaphorical pope of the friars is in direct disregard for the established hierarchy of the New Spanish church. This hierarchy required that the mendicants report directly to the secular bishops and through them, the

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[122] See note 23.

pope. At Acolman, the friars in the apse murals report not to secular bishops, but to Augustinian bishops and cardinals who are under the direction of Augustine himself, the "light of the church."

With their rows of massive bishops, cardinals, and popes, the apse murals at Acolman may initially appear to be an affirmation of secular authority and hierarchy in the church. Such an hierarchy would have logically concluded with a row of secular priests. Instead, the Augustinians ranked themselves in the position of the secular priests and under the direction of Augustine as their pope. In Acolman's apse murals, the Augustinians hold onto their favored position in the New Spanish church by serving as the foundation of the Roman Church.

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction, I noted that the mendicant church did not completely disappear because of secular pressure and the rise of the Jesuits during the late sixteenth century. Although they had a number of their privileges revoked, the mendicants in central Mexico were able to resist secularization until the mid eighteenth century, retaining a number of their early churches until that time. The mid eighteenth-century secularization, which entailed replacing mendicant priests with secular priests, was part of the reforms initiated by the Bourbon monarchs to reassert royal control over the colonies.[123]

The Augustinians maintained Acolman until 1754, when it was secularized.[124] What is perhaps most remarkable about Acolman's eighteenth-century friars is that they completed a massive renovation of the church in 1735, only nineteen years before secularization.[125] Apparently, even in this late period, the friars did not foresee their livelihood threatened by secularization. Instead, they renovated their church as though they saw themselves in control of it for many more years.

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[123] D.A. Brading. "Tridentine Catholicism and Enlightened Despotism in Bourbon Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 15 (May 1983): 1-22, esp. 6-11. Brading speculates on the reasons why secularization was finally so effective. One of the major reasons was that a considerable number of mendicants were independently renouncing their vows, indicating that there was already a movement within the mendicant orders to secularize. Brading does not specifically discuss the situation at Acolman, and I could not find more information about Acolman during the eighteenth century.

[124] Gibson, 107.

[125] We know this restoration occurred because of the inscription on the *arco del coro.* More about the restoration is in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Perhaps in this spirit of renewal, the seventeenth-century friars at Acolman took apart a late sixteenth-century retablo and reused components of it in a new retablo. Guillermo Tovar de Teresa contends that two sixteenth-century paintings, the *Annunciation* and the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, along with two relief sculptures of Sts. Peter and Paul (now at the *Museo Nacional del Virreinato*), were once part of an original sixteenth-century retablo. It is also possible that a torso of St. Nicolás de Tolentino, identified as sixteenth century and now in the museum at Acolman, was also part of this retablo. The existence of a retablo is also attested to by a document in the *Archivo General de la Nación*, dated 1576, in which Viceroy Martín Enríquez de Almansa gave the citizens of Acolman permission to log a certain amount of wood in order to build a retablo.[126]

Both the *Annunciation* and the *Adoration of the Shepherds* were reused in a new seventeenth-century retablo, implying that the friars were not trying to obliterate their sixteenth-century past, but were intent on keeping their church up-to-date and in good repair. I would suggest that the friars also whitewashed their apse murals as part of a regular program of renovation in order to adapt Acolman to changing historical circumstances.[127] This process was perhaps responsible for the eighteenth-century

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[126] Guillermo Tovar de Teresa. *Renacimiento en México: artistas y retablos*. México: Secretaría de Asentamientos Humanos y Obras Públicas, 1982, 310-311. In the *Annunciation*, there are both sixteenth and eighteenth century dates inscribed onto the surface of the picture, indicating later alterations to the image.

[127] By no means do I wish to suggest that this is the reason all mendicant murals were whitewashed. This discussion is only intended to cover Acolman.

painting that may have once filled the nave.[128] Today, we have traces of eighteenth-century painting in the choir balcony and the east wall behind the altar. We also have an elaborate painted door frame surrounding a hypothetical north door.[129] The eighteenth-century repainting indicates that it was not the existence of wall paintings, per se, that was problematic. Rather, there was some other reason impelling the Augustinians to cover their sixteenth-century murals.

We have no documents connected with the whitewashing at Acolman, and there is no scholarly consensus on why the whitewashing occurred. The traditional scholarly view, espoused by Kubler for example, is that murals were covered for stylistic reasons alone.[130] This assumption is derived from a 1729 account by the Augustinian Matías de Escobar who wrote that murals in the Augustinian *convento* of Cuitzeo were whitewashed because of their outdated style.[131]

Peterson disagrees with Kubler's conclusions and posits that stylistic reasons were only partially responsible for the whitewashing campaign. She argues that the whitewashing campaign was initiated by the secular clergy and backed by the Crown to curtail the influence and power of the mendicant orders. For example, the Third Mexican Provincial Council of 1585 (which instituted the Counter Reformation reforms)

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[128] See note 78.

[129] From interior pictures alone, I am unable to determine if there ever was a north door. From the exterior, it appears that none existed. It would not have been unusual to have a false north door in a sixteenth-century mission church. See Lara, 139.

[130] Kubler, 371-372.

[131] Peterson, 171.

declared that all art must correctly depict Catholic doctrine as formulated by the Counter Reformation. Among other things, this resulted in rules prohibiting indigenous artists from producing and selling art. Existing art produced by indigenous artists, such as murals, was also suspect.[132]

Before 1946, most historians would have agreed with Peterson's assessment of the wide-ranging effects of Tridentine reforms in New Spain. In 1946, German historian Hubert Jedin challenged the literature's dominant characterization of the sixteenth century as a period shaped by the distinct and convenient categories of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. According to Jedin, the roots of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation can be traced to much earlier periods. Therefore, these movements did not necessarily have the dramatic social impact imputed to them by some scholars. Most subsequent historians have embraced Jedin's analysis and conclusions.[133]

Working within Jedin's more broad-based definition of sixteenth-century reform, a number of scholars have closely examined the real impact of the Council of Trent on society and religion. Many of these scholars have concluded that the effectiveness of the Council of Trent usually depended on local circumstances and the tenacity of already-existing local traditions.[134] New Spain was one of the places where the Council of Trent appears to have had a delayed effect. As Stafford Poole writes, the Council of Trent,

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[132] Peterson, 171-175.

[133] John W O'Malley Jr. "Was Ignatius Loyola a church reformer? How to Look at Early Modern Catholicism." *Catholic Historical Review* 77 (April 1991): 177. O'Malley does not provide full citation information for Jedin's article.

[134] O'Malley Jr., 183.

promulgated in New Spain during the 1585 Third Provincial Council, was initially ineffective because the mendicants refused to adopt its mandates. They were particularly opposed to those mandates which would have made the mendicants completely subject the secular clergy. Because in many cases they were still the most powerful and influential branch of the New Spanish church, the mendicants were able to resist these reforms and continue independently of secular influence.[135] If the impact of the Council of Trent on the mendicants was initially negligible, how could it have instigated the immediate whitewashing of mendicant murals? Furthermore, why would the mendicants embrace a campaign designed to lessen their influence? At a time when they were actively defending their position in the church, why would they have obliterated evidence of that position?

Acolman's apse murals are symptomatic of the late sixteenth-century mendicant church as it defended itself against the pressure of the secular clergy. These murals represent the Augustinians as the foundation of an allegorical Church connoting papal power and influence. Were these same murals subsequently hidden by the mendicants because they considered their sixteenth-century project a failure? Like the construction of a new retablo in the seventeenth century or the restoration of the church in 1735, I suggest that the whitewashing of the apse was not a renunciation of the past. Rather, it can be seen as evidence that the Augustinians at Acolman continued to confront the dynamics of historical change long after the close of the sixteenth century.

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[135] Stafford Poole. "Opposition to the Third Mexican Council." *The Americas* 25 (Oct. 1968): 111-159.

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